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Introduction to the Arendt-Kazin Correspondence¹

Literary critic Alfred Kazin (1915-98), «America's grand old man of letters»,² who is best known for his critical masterpiece, *On Native Grounds* (1942) and *Walker in the City* (1951), his classic account of his Brooklyn childhood, and Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), perhaps the most important independent political thinker of the 20th century and best known for her groundbreaking books, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *The Human Condition* (1958), began their correspondence in 1947 and continued to correspond until 1974.

I think that of all the people I have ever known, you have been the staunchest in thought, the freest from conventional faithlessness.

Alfred Kazin to Hannah Arendt, 1961

More precisely, 19 letters from Alfred Kazin to Hannah Arendt written between August 23, 1948 and May 22, 1974, have been preserved. They are part of the Hannah Arendt Papers in the Library of Congress. (General, 1938-1976, n.d. - Kazin, Alfred - 1948-1974, n.d. (Series: Correspondence File,

1938-1976, n.d.). Hannah Arendt's letters to Kazin are part of the Alfred Kazin Archive in the Berg Collection of English and American Literature at The New York Public Library. The Kazin Archive includes 19 letters from Arendt, more specifically consisting of 3 ALS (autograph letters signed), 16 TLS (typed letters signed) and 2 postcards, written between April 10, 1947, and August 30, 1971.

The bulk of their correspondence takes place during the late 1940s and early 1950s, i.e., at a time when «Europe was still the biggest thing in North America».³ The very first letter is dated April 10, 1947, written by Arendt

while she was working for Schocken Books. In it, she expresses her admiration for Kazin's review of Kafka in the *New York Herald Tribune* and uses this appreciation as a vehicle to tender a lunch invitation. The very last letter, written by Kazin to Arendt on May 22, 1974, expresses Kazin's desire to introduce his daughter Cathrael to Hannah, along with his hope for her speedy recovery. Arendt had just suffered a heart attack while giving the Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. A year later, «a second coronary failure on December 4, 1975, while entertaining Salo and Jeanette Baron in her New York City apartment, proved fatal».⁴

In fact, they had met a year earlier «in 1946, at a dinner party given for Rabbi Leo Baeck by Elliot Cohen, the editor of *Commentary*».⁵ Four decades later, Kazin paints an enchanting portrait of these first encounters: «What luck. Hannah Arendt placed next to me at the dinner for Rabbi Leo Baeck, and I have sought her out several times since. Darkly handsome, bountifully interested in everything, this forty-year-old German refugee with a strong accent and such intelligence – thinking positively cascades out of her in waves – that I was enthralled, by no means unerotically. Her interest in her new country, its constitutional virtues, its political background, are as much a part of her as her passion for discussing Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, even Duns Scotus – but Kafka above all – as if they all live with her and her strenuous and Protestant husband, Heinrich Bluecher, in the shabby rooming house on Morningside Heights».⁶ On Arendt's part, we have a short sketch of Alfred Kazin, whom Harold Rosenberg – as Arendt tells her friend Mary McCarthy in May 1960 – described to her «as resembling in walk and posture an arrogant camel», an image that she is still «incapable to get out of (her) mind».⁷

The periodical that Kazin mentions, *Commentary*, was founded at the end of World War II by the Jewish Committee, «in line with its 'general program' to enlighten and clarify

public opinion on problems of Jewish concern».⁸ Its editor was Elliot E. Cohen, the magazine was liberal, and Hannah Arendt also wrote for it.⁹ In May 1960, in observance of its fifteenth anniversary year, *Commentary* invited Sidney Hook, chairman of the department of philosophy at New York University, H. Stuart Hughes, professor of history at Harvard, Hans J. Morgenthau, director of the Center for the Study of American Foreign Policy at the University of Chicago, and one of Arendt's close friends, and Charles P. Snow, author of a then widely discussed essay, «The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution», to participate in a three-hour round-table discussion on the moral and political questions surrounding the possibility of a nuclear war.¹⁰ Norman Podhoretz had in 1960 taken over as editor of *Commentary*. In the early seventies, it drifted to the right and become neoconservative.¹¹ But during the editorship of Elliot Cohen and so in the time that Arendt contributed articles, it had been outspokenly liberal. Founded in November 1945, it was hospitable to a «new maturity and sophistication among Jewish writers in America», among them Saul Bellow, Lionel Trilling, Karl Shapiro, Alfred Kazin, and Hannah Arendt.

Kazin and Arendt, both Jewish, both living in New York City, were part of what was then often identified as the «New York Intellectuals».¹² At the time, both had known each other for more than a decade and both had established their reputation in the American intellectual world. Alfred Kazin, the son of poor immigrant Jews from Brooklyn, was a twenty-seven-year-old author when his book *On Native Ground* made him an authority on American literature. Kazin understood himself as a «writer, not an academic savant», although his professional life was primarily that of «a critic, literary scholar, and teacher of literature».¹³

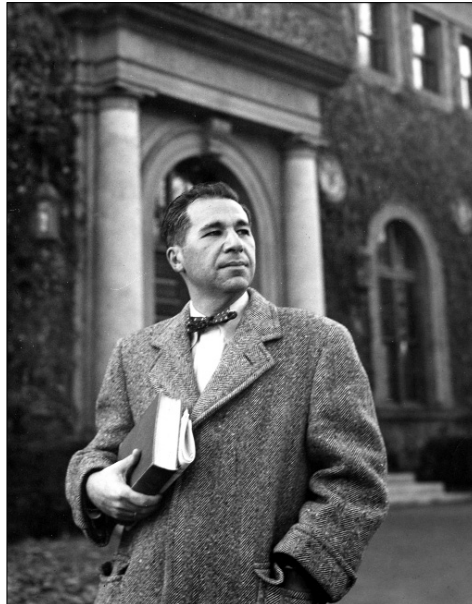
Hannah Arendt, then already a cultivated intellectual, had to flee Germany when the

National Socialists came to power, escaped to Paris in 1933 and managed, together with her husband, Heinrich Blücher, to reach the eastern shores of America in May 1941. While living in New York in the forties, she wrote the book that established her reputation in the United States. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was published a decade after she arrived in the United States, in the same year that she received her American citizenship. It was Alfred Kazin who forwarded the manuscript to Robert Giroux, who was working for the publishing house of Harcourt, Brace and Company.¹⁴ Giroux was quite excited about the manuscript he had received, writing Arendt in November 1949: «I enclose the

contracts covering your book *A History of Totalitarianism* according to the terms we discussed. (...) Needless to say, we are delighted to be publishing your work».¹⁵ Kazin's commentary on this was simple and right to the point: «Hannah was on her way».¹⁶ In a selection of his notebooks, published in 1996, we can read a more detailed story of this exciting moment that also gives us an insight into Kazin's support for Arendt, who was then still a newco-



Hannah Arendt sammen med direktøren for Center for Advanced Studies ved Wesleyan University, Sigmund Neumann. Foto: Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University.



Alfred Kazin i 1954-55. Foto: D.I. Crossley, Smith College Archives

mer in the English language: «Hannah Arendt has finished *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and I've been going over the manuscript to de-Teutonize many of the too summary sentences. Extraordinary book. It has really shaken me. But there is so much to rework in her English that I wondered how far I should go, and asked Van Wyck Brooks to look at it. (...) To my relief Van Wyck finally said of Hannah's manuscript 'It will do!' and trotted out the cocktails.»¹⁷ Here we also get a glimpse of the prehistory of the manuscript's journey. For it was Kazin, in his function as a literary adviser to Harcourt Brace, «who took the book to his chief editor Bob Giroux» after the «Boston publisher who had an option on it» rejected it. Giroux, Kazin presumed, «must have stayed up all night to read it, because he called me in the morning sounding reverential. 'It's a great book. Of course we'll publish it.'»¹⁸

Four years earlier, on April 10, 1947, Hannah Arendt had written a letter to Alfred Kazin referring to his «excellent review of Kafka in the Herald Tribune» as a reason for

suggesting a «lunch appointment». Kazin's name had been linked with hers in 1944 when the *Magazine Digest*, *Jewish Contemporary Record*, had branded both as «prime examples of 'the trend of self-excoriation manifesting itself in times of sorrow and frustration'.»¹⁹ Arendt received this criticism for her review of Stefan Zweig's autobiography. She admired Kazin's review of Kafka because he understood «that Kafka's genius was due to

his ability to see 'in his private and contemporary agony that part of all of us which is more real than the public reality' and thus, to accept 'his torment as a guide to the human condition'.» She was also impressed by Kazin's «understanding of the philosophical content of this work as 'man's search for his own meaning'.» But Arendt would not be Arendt, if she did not at some point, or in some small detail, disagree, asking him «Why, for heaven's sake, do you think this was a 'Czech genius'?» She then cited the vital facts about Kafka, that he was «born in Prague as a Jew, (...) never wrote a word in the Czech language, but, as (Kazin) (knew) always in German», concluding «whoever may claim him, and I guess we Jews should, if it is a matter of nationality, the Czechs will hardly be able or willing to do so.»²⁰ At any rate, Arendt and Kazin met, and for the next two decades maintained a mutual interest in each other's life and work, often touched by humor.

When Kazin sent Arendt his book about modern American prose literature, *On Native Grounds*, she thanked him by telling him that she had «been reading it every day at breakfast



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Foto: Nils Vik

(when she [was] in her most antagonistic mood)», and that she never before «learnt so much about this country with so great delight.»²¹ Kazin, on his part, replied that he «at first (...) was insulted,» asking himself whether he could be «*that* readable?» For that would mean, «Then I can't be sound!» But «then (he) reflected that, after all, a solid German education represents something that we here just don't get. For myself, since I begin the soul-tearing

task of putting words together *after* breakfast, I try at that meal to be as frivolous and brainless as possible. Any morning you may find me staring at the Lord and Taylor ads in yesterday's Times, or figuring out the number of square yards that have to be seeded in the garden.»²² This humorous play on the European-American opposition finds a responsive partner in Arendt's sense of comedy.

In 1951, she went to Yale for Hermann Broch's funeral, telling Kazin afterwards: «Broch's death as all things earthly had also its very comical aspects. Nobody, not his brother or his son or his 'best friend' knew that he was married. Tableau! When I arrived with this news, two of the widows were already in each other's hair, a third was expected, a fourth was being prepared, etc. Since Rilke's death, I [would] guess [that] no such funeral [ever] took place. And all this in Yale and among our dear puritans -- who by the way behaved themselves very well. I had only to remind the head of the German department of his vast knowledge of biographies of poets. He said then: Oh yes, but you know this was the

first whom I knew personally -- and started to understand just everything.» Arendt's commentary: «The Americans had at least the somewhat soothing illusion that this was almost normal in European behavior, for a poet at least, whereas the Europeans, without any such illusions --- Well, this however, we both, i.e., Broch and I, are going to survive beautifully.»²³

Hannah Arendt knew Hermann Broch since 1946 and marked their friendship by writing a review of Broch's *The Death of Vergil*. Soon after his book *The Sleepwalkers* appeared, she wrote an essay, «The Achievement of Hermann Broch,» for the *Kenyon Review* (1949), followed by an introduction to the two volumes of his essays published in 1955, and a portrait of Broch after his death in 1951. Arendt admired Broch's literary work. She called him a «reluctant poet» whose novella, «The Servant-girl Zerline», one of the eleven novellas in *The Guiltless*, she adjudged to be «perhaps the finest love story in German literature.»²⁴ What is perhaps more interesting is that her overt disagreement with Broch's understanding of freedom is openly expressed in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) as well as her *The Human Condition* (1958).²⁵ «Broch», she wrote, «never believed that [the] political sphere, in which man acts outwardly and is engaged by the machinery of the outside world, could be brought to order by categories which were political in origin.»²⁶ «Politics,» according to Broch, «is the mechanics of the external bustle.»²⁷ For Arendt, politics means the very opposite: the sense of politics is freedom, a basic mode of being. «As a mode of being,» it «can unfold its full virtuosity» only «together with the public space.» It is Arendt's opinion that we find the clearest articulation of «a freedom experienced in the process of acting and nothing else in the Greek *polis*».²⁸ It was the ancient Greeks who understood that the end or *raison d'être* [of politics] would be to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear.²⁹ But

this difference of opinion in no way affected Arendt's friendship with Hermann Broch, as the letters the two exchanged between 1946 and 1951 illustrate.³⁰

Let me return to Kazin and Arendt and their interest in Kafka. Three years before their lunch meeting, in 1944, *Partisan Review* published Hannah Arendt's article on Kafka entitled *Franz Kafka: A Reevaluation* (On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his death),³¹ not without one of the two founders and chief editors, Philip Rahv, informing her in his letter that they «in some respects» didn't at all agree with her «interpretation of Kafka». But they valued her point of view as «interesting and well worth presenting to (their) readers.»³² *Partisan Review* by the late 1930s had become «more than an organ of the New York Intellectuals – it had become an institution, a magazine that began as early as 1935 to reject or revise «key components of doctrinaire and classical Marxism».³³ The magazine reprinted its original editorial statement in *Partisan Review* on the occasion of its fiftieth Anniversary, in 1985. The statement clearly distances the magazine in general from any given ideology, in particular from the Communist Party, from which it moved away because of the editors' conviction «that the totalitarian trend is inherent in that movement and that it can no longer be combated from within» (p. 12). The magazine opened its pages to «any tendency which is relevant to literature in our time», not asking «conformity» from its writers, and understanding Marxism in culture first of all as an «instrument of analysis and evaluation». *Partisan Review* took its function to be «the medium of democratic controversy».³⁴

Hannah Arendt and Alfred Kazin both contributed articles and book reviews to this magazine.³⁵ So did Randall Jarrell, American poet and one of Arendt's close friends, who wrote among other things an article about the poet W.H. Auden. Another contributor was H.J. Kaplan, whom Arendt mentions in her letter to

Kazin (letter 17) and who regularly sent a letter from Paris, one of the European capitals the magazine used to inform its readers about.³⁶ We come here to a characteristic of this magazine which it in fact held in common with another important magazine in those days, Dwight MacDonald's *politics*, namely the transatlantic or American-European view on politics and culture. As far as it concerns Kazin and Arendt, *politics* made a strong impression on both of them. Alfred Kazin stated: «I owe to *politics* my discovery of Simone Weil».³⁷ And Hannah Arendt explicitly shared Dwight Macdonald's understanding of politics, his intention to «bring back to the public opinion the meaning of politics as the Greeks represent it»³⁸. Macdonald and Arendt both were convinced that politics is about more than administering budgets and managing national wealth or acting out of private interest.

The transatlantic spirit that I just mentioned is no less expressed in Philip Rahv's introduction to the anthology *The Story of American Experience in the Old World* (1947).³⁹ It is a spirit that is repeatedly expressed in Arendt's and Kazin's correspondence. Kazin, the young Jewish-American author who lectured and traveled in Europe, regularly sent her his impressions from cities that were in their initial phases of recovery from World War II, such as Paris, Marseille, Aix-en-Provence and Marseille in France, Florence and Rome in Italy, Salzburg in Austria, and Cologne in Germany. Arendt, the Jewish-German émigré told him of her experiences in the New World, America, on her way to building a remarkable career. The United States was a country whose constitution Arendt deeply admired. This admiration is expressed in one of her first lectures after having arrived in the United States, her «Rand School Lecture» in 1948. Arendt pointed to the «American Republic (as) the only political body based on great eighteenth-century revolutions that has survived 150 years of industrialization and capitalist development, that has been able to cope with the rise of the bourge-

oisie, and that has withstood all temptations, despite strong and ugly racial prejudices in its society, to play the game of nationalist and imperialist politics».⁴⁰

She maintained this admiration throughout her life, even when she, against the background of American foreign policy in Vietnam, wrote *The Crisis of the Republic*.⁴¹ In the very last year of her life, in 1975, her fearless engagement in favor of the Republic, as well as her bridge-building between Europe and the United States, was honored on both continents. Arendt was one of the speakers of the Boston Bicentennial Forum. On May 20, 1975, she gave a lecture entitled «Home to Roost», a lecture that was also broadcast by the National Public Radio.⁴² In the same year, that is, one year after the last letter in her correspondence with Alfred Kazin, the Danish government awarded Arendt its Sonning Prize for Contributions to European Civilization. This prize had never before been received by a woman or by an American. In her speech in Copenhagen Arendt said:

It is no small matter to be recognized for a contribution to European civilization for somebody who left Europe thirty-five years ago – by no means voluntarily – and then became a citizen of the United States, entirely and consciously voluntarily because the Republic was indeed a government of law and not of men. What I learned in these first crucial years between immigration and naturalization amounted roughly to a self-taught course in the political philosophy of the Founding Fathers, and what convinced me was the factual existence of a body politic, utterly unlike the European nation-states with their homogeneous populations, their organic sense of history, their more or less decisive division into classes, their national sovereignty and its notion of a reason of State. The idea that when the chips were down diversity must be sacrificed to the 'union sacrée' of the nation, once the greatest triumph of the assimilatory power of the dominant ethnic group, only now begins to crumble under the pressure of the threatening transformation of all government

of the United States not excluded, into bureaucracies, the rule of neither law nor men but of anonymous offices or computers whose entirely depersonalized domination may turn out to become a greater threat to freedom and to that minimum of civility, without which no communal life is conceivable, than the most outrageous arbitrariness of tyrants of the past has ever been.⁴³

Alfred Kazin, her close friend from the early fifties, had by then become a famous writer, critic, and established member of the American academy. In 1975, he was a «writer-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome».⁴⁴ Since the fifties he had published *The Inmost Leaf* (1955), *Contemporaries* (1962), and *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1965), not to mention his numerous contributions to magazines and newspapers such as *Harper's*, *Commentary*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *New Republic*. Among the books he edited were *The Portable William Blake* (1946) and Hermann Melville's *Moby Dick* (1956); his introduction was very much appreciated by Hannah Arendt (see letter 30, September 29, 1956). He also pursued an academic career as professor at Smith College, Northampton (1953-54), and as professor of American Studies at Amherst. From there he returned to New York in 1957, starting with a one-year appointment at New York University, followed by four years of teaching at the New School for Social Research as a visiting lecturer (1958-63). In 1963 he was appointed to a Distinguished Professorship at the Stony Brook Campus of the State University of New York, where he remained until 1973, followed by a professorship at Hunter College and the Graduate School of the City University of New York. After retiring from the University in 1985 he continued to lecture in New York as well as throughout the country.⁴⁵ But by 1978 he had also gone through «many painful personal breaks in (his) life», two marriages and two divorces. In 1977 when he met the writer Judith Dunford, he finally felt that he had «come home at

last, back where (he) had always meant to be.»

When he died in 1998, Andrew Delbanco wrote on Alfred Kazin for the *New York Review of Books*. He praised Kazin's *On Native Grounds*, and his trilogy of memoirs *A Walker in The City*, *Starting Out in the Thirties*, and *New York Jew* (1978), his reviews for their «irrepressible love for literature», his «keen instinct for the psychological dynamics of literary history», pointing out that Kazin «was not chiefly interested in abstract ideas». Instead, «his only methodological principle was that good criticism requires openness and immersion». But above all, Kazin took «American history as his history by inhabiting it with a fiercely, sympathetic imagination».⁴⁶

Arendt and Kazin's friendship, as so often with her other friendships, was both a shared circle of friends they had in common as well as sharing some basic political ideas. These ideas are not an explicit topic of their correspondence, but they grounded their friendship. We find them expressed in a subtle but nevertheless clear way in the fact that both were writing for *Partisan Review*, a magazine that had moved away from the Communist Party. Sometimes small hints, even half sentences were sufficient for them to indicate what debate they referred to, e.g. when Kazin mentioned liberalism (see letter 5, August 11, 1950) or Sidney Hook's article in *The New York Times Magazine*, and Arendt immediately referred to Kazin telling him that she had followed Hook and the printed answers (Arendt to Kazin, Sunday, 1953). By reading their letters we enter the world of some of the leading newspapers and magazines of the late 1940s and early 1950s in America, the *New York Times* and *The New York Times Magazine*, *Partisan Review* and *The Review of Politics*.

Their friendship in the early years included spending the holiday together at Manommet; during Arendt's second journey to Europe (March until August 1952) Alfred Kazin and Ann Birstein, later his third wife, came from

Cologne where he had a guest professorship and spent the day with her (see letter 15, March 3, 1952). Hannah Arendt enjoyed being in Paris, discovering a new sense for architecture when visiting with them in Chartres, and met «Gott und die Welt», among others, the journalist and essayist Francois Bondy, the philosopher Kojève, who also had written his dissertation with Jaspers, the French writer Albert Camus, the French sociologist and essayist Raymond Aron, and the philosopher Jean Wahl.⁴⁷

Friendship was one of Hannah Arendt's great gifts. Hans Jonas, her friend for over fifty years, called this gift at her funeral, «her genius for friendship», pointing out where their friendship began, namely, in Marburg in 1925 «in Bultmann's New Testament seminar where (the) two were the only Jews».⁴⁸ Comradeship or friendship played a central role in Arendt's life and thought, whether it was her old friendships with Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, or her extraordinary capacity for new friendships later in her life, with Waldemar Gurian, Mary McCarthy, Randall Jarrell, W.H. Auden, Dwight Macdonald and, of course, Alfred Kazin. Friendship could, moreover, possess a political dimension. To avoid misunderstandings, friendship is not compassion, since friendship refers to the individual, and «friendship is as selective as compassion is egalitarian.»⁴⁹

Looking back at his friendship with Hannah, Kazin wrote in his 1978 autobiography, *New York Jew*: «From her first book in English, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt was obsessed with genocide and the threat of future holocausts in an 'overpopulated' world. She became vital to my life. Much as I loved her and submitted patiently to an intellectual loneliness that came out as arrogance, it was for the direction of her thinking that I loved her, for the personal insistencies she gained from her comprehension of the European catastrophe. She

gave her friends – writers so various as Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, Mary McCarthy, the Jewish historian Salo Baron – intellectual courage before the moral terror the war had willed to us».⁵⁰

Kazin treasured his friendship with Arendt, resulting in an intense correspondence between 1947 and 1957. While their books and articles show their interest in politics, their correspondence focuses on creativity, their friends, and their encounters with the world. The year 1952 was politically overshadowed by the Korean conflict. Personally for Arendt, it was the year after the publication of her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She went to Europe, meeting old friends, enjoying new friends, and discovering architecture, «one of Blücher's great passions». It was the year in which she received a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation to study «totalitarian elements of Marxism», and when she was invited to lecture at Princeton. In Alfred Kazin's journals, we read that «Hannah the refugee on Morningside Drive is a great favorite in Germany».⁵¹

Through the fifties and into the sixties Arendt became even more of «a great favorite», not only in Germany but also in the United States. To sketch some of her career moves: In 1956 she gave the Walgreen Foundation Lectures at the University of Chicago and in 1963 accepted a five-year appointment with the Committee on Social Thought. From 1955 on, the Rockefeller Foundation, which in particular provided grants to «scholars doing research on problems in the field of international relations»⁵² regularly asked Hannah Arendt for her opinion about a number of applicants, encouraging her to give her «frank judgement of the research proposal and, if possible, also of the applicant's capacity of imaginative and original scholarship». In the same year, September 1955, she participated in Milan at the conference on «The Future of Freedom», sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Her talk entitled «The Rise

and Development of Totalitarianism and Authoritarian Forms of Government in the Twentieth Century» was published in a reworked version both in English and in German journals and collections, in the *Review of Politics*, under the title «Authority in the Twentieth Century», in *Der Monat* under the title «Was ist Autorität?», and in *Nomos: Yearbook of the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy*, with the title «What was Authority?». Her book *The Human Condition* was published in 1958. In the same year, her friend and mentor Karl Jaspers received the Frankfurt Peace Prize, and it was Arendt who was asked to give the Peace Prize address. One year later, in 1959, she received the Lessing Prize of the Free City of Hamburg. In the acceptance speech she gave, she stressed explicitly her «membership in the group of Jews expelled from Germany», linking this personal story to the situation of receiving public recognition and giving a reflection on the «smiles of Fortuna»: «In awards, the world speaks out, and if we accept the award and speak our gratitude for it, we can do so only by ignoring ourselves and acting entirely within the framework of our attitude toward the world, toward a world and public to which we owe the space into which we speak and in which we are heard. But the honor not only reminds us emphatically of the gratitude we owe the world; it also, to a very high degree, obligates us to it». ⁵³ By the end of the fifties, Arendt had undoubtedly become a very prominent persona. She would become even more prominent with her report on Adolf Eichmann, whose trial in Jerusalem she covered for the *New Yorker*.

From the sixties until the end of her life, she received honorary degrees from a dozen American universities. She became a professor at the University of Chicago from 1963 until 1967, and from 1967 until 1975 at the School for Social Research in New York City. She was accepted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and

Sciences, precisely the institution where Kazin had hoped to meet her in May 1974 so that he finally could have introduced her to his daughter Cathrael, who was born at a time when the correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Alfred Kazin was one of intimate friendship. In 1975, the day after she died, one could read many accounts about her very successful journey into American society, her major works and awards, her worldwide fame. David Bird, the author of one article, quoted Mr. Jovanovich, her publisher, who admitted that once he had written a paper in which he had «borrowed» some of Hannah Arendt's ideas, later confessing that he had stolen something from her. Her answer had been: «Isn't it marvelous! That's what it's for». ⁵⁴ Wanting to have ideas in free flight, we might say, was part of her being at home in the world.

I have tried to sketch the very successful lives of these two very famous intellectuals, the Jewish-American writer Alfred Kazin, and the Jewish-European thinker Hannah Arendt. They both made their way into the American intellectual and cultural elite. At the same time both belonged to the generation for whom the key experience was the Holocaust. The Holocaust haunted Kazin's private life through his wife's nightmares in Cologne. A decade later, at a time when «the tumultuous revolutionary sixties filled the present», events like a dinner party conversation, where some guests denied that the Holocaust had ever happened, could nevertheless bring the past back into the present: «The Holocaust would not go away». ⁵⁵

The same can be said about Arendt. To understand how it had all happened, how it could have happened, dominated Arendt in her first book in English, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and throughout all her remaining writings. Kazin remembered from the forties that her «constant refrain was 'the decisive break with tradition'». To him she seemed to be possessed by an «intellectual passion as well as

some laconic personal despair (...) to cry out a wildly urgent need for constancy in life, every instance of life».⁵⁶ In the summer of 1960 Adolf Eichmann had been kidnapped in Argentina and brought to Israel to be put on trial. Arendt suggested to William Shawn, the editor of *The New Yorker*, that she go to Israel to serve as a trial reporter. When he accepted, she rescheduled all her teaching at Northwestern University, «changed the term of a one-year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation», and cancelled a lecture at Vassar, telling Vassar College in a letter on January 2, 1961: «To attend this trial is somehow, I feel, an obligation I owe my past.»⁵⁷ When her report was published as a book in 1963, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, it created a firestorm of controversy. William Shawn wired Arendt: «People in town seem to be discussing little else».⁵⁸

This is the time when the correspondence between Arendt and Kazin becomes very meager, followed by years of silence. From the Journals of Alfred Kazin we learn that Arendt had given him the Eichmann manuscript, «though we are no longer the friends we used to be». Kazin, as so many other readers of those days, did not understand how and why Arendt, after witnessing the Eichmann trial, «turned her attention» from *superfluosness*, «her key concept in her earlier analysis of radical evil», to *thoughtlessness*. The Eichmann trial taught her that «what is most frightening is that this monstrous deed, this deliberate attempt to destroy and transform the human condition, does not require monstrous or 'evil motives'. It can result from the thoughtlessness – the inability to think – of ordinary, normal people».⁵⁹ This detached rational insight in Arendt's report on Eichmann becomes palatable, first of all, with the distance of time. Forty years ago, many in the American-Jewish community misunderstood Arendt's term, «the banality of evil». One of her great disappointments was that Kurt Blumenfeld, the «most influential proponent of Zionism in Germany» before World War II, and Arendt's

«mentor in politics» during the 1920s, «had broken with her».⁶⁰ While Kazin wrote in his journals from the late forties that he loved «this woman intensely», that she «is such a surprise, such a gift», that he is «a sucker for this kind of advanced European mind, so much better stocked and subtler than the exhausted radicalism of almost every Jewish intellectual I know»,⁶¹ and that «no one else has recognized the essentially arbitrary, make-believe nature of the reality of Nazism and Communism alike have imposed on their submissive victims»,⁶² her book on Eichmann, or more precisely, «the tone she has taken to the doomed people», made him «suffer».⁶³ Their letters do not tell whether the controversy over her *Report on Eichmann* drove them apart. From 1963 until 1974 there are only 4 letters: one in 1966, a year after Randall Jarrell's death – Jarrell had been a common friend; two undated, and one last letter in the year 1974. According to an entry in Kazin's unpublished journals it were social reasons leading to the gradually falling away of their friendship. He noted on January 18, 1964: «The breakdown of our friendship, I see now, really began at that spring 1954 meeting of the national institute when she got her grant. And obviously, it has been the competitiveness on my side, as much as Ann's resentment, that explain the gradual falling away of our intimacy. There is no reason why one should try, in personal relations to overlook the pains of such competitive, jealousy and resentment. Hannah certainly blots out the other person, and you have to submit to her final authority or break away».⁶⁴

This did not, on the other hand, hold Kazin back from rising to Arendt's defense in 1963 when the publication of her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* not only led to many angry letters, but also to a public forum organized by Irving Howe. Arendt had «declined Howe's invitation to speak», so did Bruno Bettelheim. Howe, Gerald Sorin is telling us in his book *Irving Howe: A Life of Passionate Dissent*, «in order to

achieve ‘some balance’ turned to sociologist Daniel Bell and political scientist Raul Hilberg to ‘represent’ [Arendt’s] view». ⁶⁵ Hundreds of people had come, and Howe who had «asked – twice – for more speakers, who might support her thesis [...] declared the debate over from the floor» because nobody rose. It was then Alfred Kazin «who had entered the hall very late and quite tipsy, leaped to his feet after Howe’s announcement to speak in Arendt’s favor». ⁶⁶ Kazin, for his part, recalled

in a 1976 interview: «I did it [for] Hannah as a friend». ⁶⁷

Having come to the end of my introduction, there is not much more for me to do than to hope that their letters, demonstrating a friendship strong enough to build a bridge between Europe and America, and profound enough to survive a long period of silence, encounter a new generation with «understanding hearts» and as much love for the world as Arendt and Kazin expressed. ●

Noter

1. I alone am responsible for this work, but it is the culmination of a long period of research, of discussions with friends and scholars, of the speed of the internet, and of the supportive help of many librarians. I am deeply indebted to the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress for granting me a scholarship, and to three persons in particular, to the librarians David Kresh and Thomas Mann in the Library of Congress, and to the philosopher Theodore Kisiel, whose interest and continuing support of my work encourages me to persevere, and who has been kind enough to do the «englishing».
2. Newsday; June 6, 1998.
3. This is a judgment of Delmore Schwartz, and Alfred Kazin agreed on it. See Alfred Kazin, *New York Jew*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, p. 60.
4. «Arendt, Hannah (1906-1975),» in: *Jewish Women in America. A Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Moore, vol. 1, A-L, New York/London: Routledge, 1997, p. 63.
5. *Alfred Kazin’s America – Critical and Personal Writings*, edited and with an Introduction by Ted Solotaroff, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003, p. 467.
6. Kazin: *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment. From the Journals of Alfred Kazin*, selected and edited by the Author, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, p. 106.
7. Arendt to Mary McCarthy, New York May 18, 1960, in: *Between Friends. The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy 1949-1975*, edited and with an introduction by Carol Brightman, New York / San Diego / London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995, p. 76.
8. Preface to *The Commentary Reader. Two Decades of Articles and Stories*, edited by Norman Podhoretz, New York: Atheneum, 1966, with an introduction by Alfred Kazin, p. vii.
9. Hannah Arendt: «Germany – 1950,» in: *Commentary*, October 1950, re-edited in: *The Commentary Reader*, edited by Norman Podhoretz, 1966, p. 49-60.
10. This round-table discussion is originally in *Commentary*, October 1961, vol. 32:4, p. 277-304; it was reprinted in *The Commentary Reader*, 1966, p. 159-199. The introduction to this reader titled «The Jew as Modern American Writer» is written by Alfred Kazin.
11. See William Corbett, *New York Literary Lights*, Saint Paul Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1998, p. 65.
12. About the New York Intellectuals see: Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals & Their World*, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / Oxford: University of California Press, 1991; Harvey M. Teres, *Renewing the Left. Politics: Imagination, and the New York Intellectuals*, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
13. Kazin, about himself in: *Contemporary Authors: Autobiographical Series*, vol. 7, 1988, p. 85-96.
14. Kazin, *New York Jew*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, p. 200.
15. Robert Giroux to Arendt, November 3, 1949, Series: Correspondence File, 1938-1976, n.d., Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
16. Kazin: *Writing Was Everything*, p. 129. See also: David Laskin, *Partisans*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, p. 220.
17. Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning In Every Moment – From the Journals of Alfred Kazin*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, p. 127f.

18. Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment*, p. 128f.
19. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt – For Love of the World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 196.
20. Arendt to Kazin, April 10, 1947, Kazin Papers, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.
21. Arendt to Kazin, August 4, 1948, Alfred Kazin Papers, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.
22. Kazin to Arendt, 28 August 1948, Series: Correspondence File, 1938-1976, n.d., Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
23. Arendt to Kazin, June 28, 1951, Alfred Kazin Papers, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.
24. Arendt, «Hermann Broch», in: Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1968, p. 113.
25. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt – For Love of the World*, p. 279.
26. Arendt, «Hermann Broch,» in: Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, p. 135.
27. Concerning Arendt's opinion about some of Broch's intellectual and political views see also the letters she and Blücher exchanged during summer and autumn 1946. *Within Four Walls – The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher 1936-1968*, edited by Lotte Kohler, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2000, p. 78f.
28. Arendt, «Freedom and Politics: A Lecture», in: *Chicago Review*, Spring 1960, vol. 14:1, p. 28-46.
29. Ibid.
30. Hannah Arendt, *Hermann Broch*, edited by Paul Michael Lützel, Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996.
31. See *Partisan Review*, Fall 1944, p. 412-422.
32. Philip Rahv to Hannah Arendt, September 9, 1944, Series: Correspondence File, Publishers, 1944-1975, n.d.–Partisan Review–1944-1964, Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
33. See Harvey M. Teres, *Renewing the Left. Politics, Imagination, and the New York Intellectuals*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 12.
34. *Partisan Review* had barely 15,000 subscribers. The present generation of American critics remembers the critics of the late 1940s and early 1950s who contributed to *Partisan Review*, «Lionel Trilling, Philip Rahv, Clement Greenberg, Alfred Kazin, and Dwight Macdonald,» as those who upheld standards, who were not without «any firm basement for judgments.» See George Cotkin, «The Democratization of Cultural Criticism», in: *The Chronicle Review*, July 2, 2004, p. B8/9. *The Saturday Review* or *Partisan Review* have ceased publication. On the political self-understanding of *Partisan Review* see Hilton Kramer: *The Twilight of the Intellectuals. Culture and Politics in the Era of the Cold War*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999, especially: *Reflections on Partisan Review*, p. 334ff.
35. Hannah Arendt, «Approaches to the 'German Problem'» (vol. 12:1, 1945); «The Devil's Share – Denis de Rougemont» (Book Review) (vol. 12:2, 1945); «William Dilthey: An Introduction – H. A. Hodges» (Book Review) (vol. 12:3, 1945); «Parties, Movements, and Classes» (vol. 12:4, 1945); «What is Existenz Philosophy?» (vol. 13:1, 1946);
36. See Randall Jarrell, «Stages of Auden's Ideology», in: *Partisan Review*, Fall 1945, p. 437-457; H. J. Kaplan, «Paris Letter», p. 473-480, H. Arendt, «Parties, Movements, and Classes», p. 504-513.
37. Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning In Every Moment – From the Journals of Alfred Kazin*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, p. 56.
38. Dwight Macdonald, *Politics*, February 1944, p. 6.
39. See «American Writers Abroad. Discovery of Europe: The Story of American Experience in the Old World», reviewed by Dumas Malone, in: *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, March 23, 1947.
40. Arendt, «Rand School Lecture», in: *Hannah Arendt – Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, edited by Jerome Kohn, New York / San Diego / London, 1994, p. 223 f.
41. Hannah Arendt, *Crisis of the Republic: Lying in Politics – Civil Disobedience – On Violence – Thoughts on Politics and Revolution*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972; see also Arendt's article «Washington's 'Problemsolvers' – Where They Went Wrong,» in: *The New York Times*, April 5, 1972.
42. See Hannah Arendt «Home to Roost», in: *The American Experiment: Perspectives on 200 Years*, edited by Sam Bass Warner Jr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976, pp. 62-79.
43. Hannah Arendt: Copenhagen, April 18, 1975. See also the article of the Danish journalist Bent Albrechtsen, «Hannah Arendt, den lille kvinde, der trods trafik og andres mening,» in: *Berlingske Tiden*, Lørdag 15. Marts 1975.
44. See Kazin, «Desperate to write», in: *Contemporary Authors: Autobiographical Series*, vol. 7, Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1988, p. 95.
45. See Richard Cook: «Alfred Kazin», in: *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 67: *Modern American Critics*

- Since 1955, edited by Gregory S. Jay, Detroit, Michigan 1988, p. 189-196; see also: *Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series*, vol. 45 (1995), p. 225-228.
46. Andrew Delbanco, «On Alfred Kazin (1915-1998)», in: *New York Review of Books*, vol. 45: 12, July 16 (1998), p. 22.
47. See Arendt's letters to Heinrich, Paris, March 30, 1952, [Paris,] 3. 31. 52, [Paris,] April 17, 52, [Paris,] 4. 24. 52, Paris, May 1, 1952, in: *Within Four Walls - The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Bluecher, 1936-1968*, edited and with an introduction by Lotte Kohler, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1996, p. 149-69.
48. Hans Jonas, «Hannah Arendt. Words spoken at the funeral service for Hannah Arendt at the Riverside Memorial Chapel in New York City on Monday, December 8, 1975», in: *Partisan Review* 43: 1 (1976), p. 13.
49. Arendt, «On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing», in: Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1968, p. 14.
51. Kazin, *New York Jew*, p. 195.
51. See Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment*, p. 149.
52. Kenneth W. Thompson to Hannah Arendt, October 8, 1965, Correspondence File, 1938-1976, n.d., Organizations, 1943-1976, n.d.-Rockefeller Foundation-1960-1969, Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. Among Arendt's evaluations were «the Committee of International Relations at Notre Dame University», Robert A. Graham's project, researching the «Vatican Diplomatic Policy in World War II», and Eric Voegelin's «professional qualifications», see: Kenneth W. Thompson to Hannah Arendt, January 31, 1955, and April 5, 1956, Correspondence File, 1938-1976, n.d., Organizations, 1943-1976, n.d.-Rockefeller Foundation-1951-1959, Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
53. Arendt: «On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing», in: Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, p. 3.
54. See David Bird: «Hannah Arendt, Political Scientist; Dead,» in: *The New York Times*, Saturday, December 6, 1975, p. 32.
55. Kazin, *New York Jew*, p. 258.
56. Kazin, *New York Jew*, p. 197.
57. Arendt to Vassar, January 2, 1961, Universities and Colleges, 1947-1975, n.d.-Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.-1960-1967, Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., cited from Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt - For Love of the World*, p. 329.
58. See Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt - For Love of the World*, p. 349. For a detailed discussion of Arendt's Report on Eichmann, and more generally, her «Jewishness», see: Richard J. Bernstein: *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.
59. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, p. 152f.
60. See Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt - For Love of the World*, p. 353.
61. See Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment*, p. 109.
62. Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment*, p. 110.
63. Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment*, p. 179.
64. Kazin, January 18, 1964, unpublished journals. I am indebted to Kazin's biographer, Richard Cook, for this passage, and to Judith Dunford, who gave permission quoting it.
65. Gerald Sorin: *Irving Howe: A Life of Passionate Dissent*, New York: New York University Press, 2002, p. 195.
66. Ibid., p. 196.
67. Kazin interviewed by Alexander Bloom, October 23, 1976, in Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 330, quoted from Gerald Sorin, *Irving Howe: A Life of Passionate Dissent*, p. 196.